Washington State Department of Transportation

Tools and Resources

The tools listed below formed the foundation of our EIS approach. The concepts we used aren't anything "new" – they are just a compilation of resources that can be used to communicate better with a broad audience.

NEPA Guidelines Writing Environmental Documents

We could not develop a sound environmental document without an in-depth understanding of the NEPA regulations it had to satisfy. Believe it or not, NEPA requires environmental documents to be clear, concise, and yes, even brief. A few interesting citations include:

40 CFR 1502.8 — EISs shall be written in plain language and may use appropriate graphics so that decision-makers and the public can readily understand them.

40 CFR 1500-1508 — Most important, NEPA documents must concentrate on the issues that are truly significant to the action in question, rather than amassing needless detail. Emphasize the portions of the environmental impact statement that are useful to decision makers and the public.

1502.2 — Prepare analytic rather than encyclopedic EISs.

40 CFR 1502.7 — EISs should normally be less than 150 pages in length. EISs for complex projects should be less than 300 pages.

WSDOT Environmental Documents

Vancouver Rail Project NEPA/SEPA Draft Environmental Impact Statement, February 2002.

Writing Resources

1. *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace* by Joseph Williams.
2. Plain Language Action and Information Network Web site, http://www.plainlanguage.gov.
3. *Planning in Plain English* by Natalie Macris, American Planning Assoc., www.planning.org

Graphics Resources

1. Edward Tufte Web site: http://www.edwardtufte.com/tufte
2. Books by Edward Tufte including:
   - *The Visual Display of Quantative Information*
   - *Envisioning Information*
   - *Visual Explanations*

Solving "Wicked Problems"

"Wicked Problems: Naming the Pain in Organizations" by E. Jeffrey Conklin & William Weil

In our agency, there has been an enthusiastic response to this remarkable paper, which we have recently discovered. It seems to track so many of the ideas we have been trying to articulate. Check it out online at:

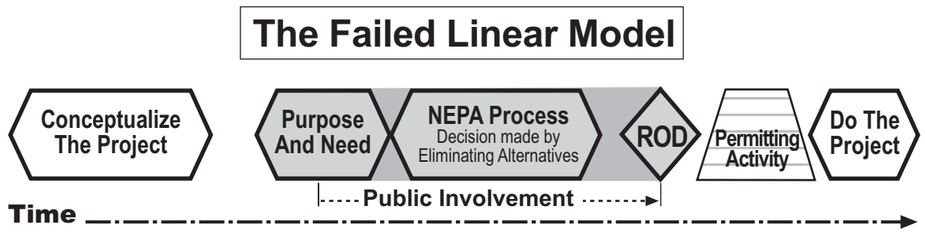
www.3m.com/meetingnetwork/readingroom/gdss_wicked.html

Washington State Department of Transportation

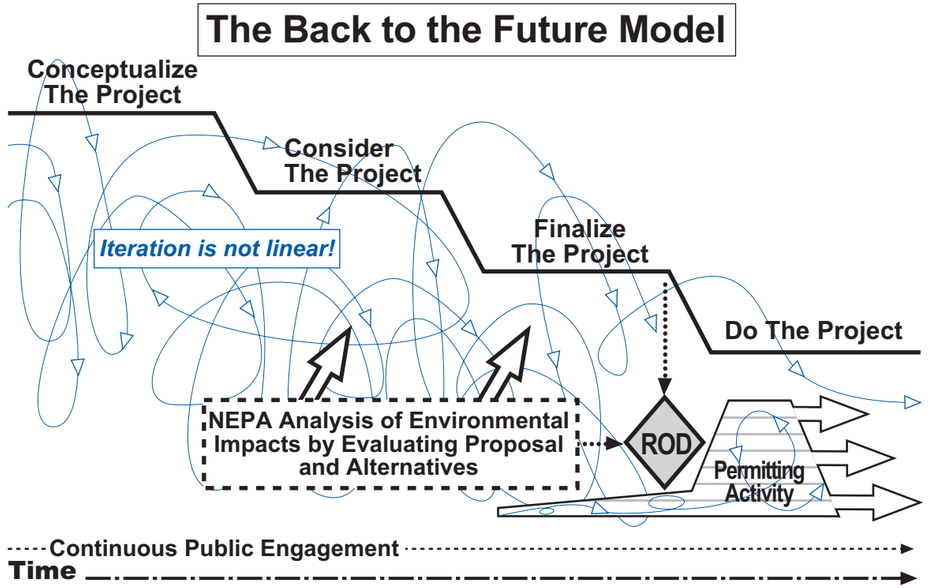
Better Practices for National Environmental Policy Act EISs

Moving a Project from Problem to Solution

The Failed Linear Model



The Back to the Future Model



Washington State Department of Transportation

Reinventing NEPA

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Seattle's Alaskan Way Viaduct Project has attracted notice[1] for successfully communicating with the public about a large and complicated proposed project. The analysis was completed under the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. But the approach WSDOT took in this Draft EIS was not just about communication techniques. The concepts were an outgrowth of broader thinking, in line with the concern for "Reinventing NEPA".

We believe that enactment of NEPA was one of Congress's most important initiatives in the second half of the 20th century. The simplicity of NEPA's core message – decision-makers should consider the environmental consequences of their proposed decisions with real information – masks its enormous power and vast sweep. NEPA is the foundation for harmonizing the natural and built environments within the context of earth-friendly social and political institutions.

Many facets of how NEPA has been implemented, however, present serious problems—Some of the key problems as we see them, are outlined below—

- NEPA has morphed over the years into an unofficial national planning law. This, NEPA was never designed to be, and it suits the task very badly. One reason is that the linearity of its procedural framework is entirely in opposition to the iterative nature of good social and engineering design, and decision-making.

- NEPA poorly accomodates the appropriate roles and responsibilities of local and state governments and their civic-based processes in the planning arena. NEPA processes are not well aligned with procedures under other environmental laws, such as the Clean Water Act, and especially for obtaining approvals under the Endangered Species Act. NEPA also has become a catch-all for considering project environmental compliance and mitigation requirements far in advance of the stage in project design where it is practical or useful to do so. Calls for "environmental streamlining" largely grow out of the delay and confusion these factors create.

- NEPA's mantra – avoid, minimize, mitigate – is a fine slogan, but it's far too blunt an instrument to meet the challenge of our complex environmental goals and objectives. Real life conflicts and tradeoffs among social values, among environmental values, and among investment opportunities require a more flexible approach. NEPA should be harnessed to develop them, rather than stand as an obstacle.

- Perhaps the most frustrating problem is that the implementers of NEPA have thwarted and undermined one of the most important aspects of its authors' intent – to involve the public. Public involvement activities have become exercises in packaging strategies, distancing and alienating rather than incorporating meaningful public discussion. It is time to re-commit the planning process to true public engagement.

In preparing the Alaskan Way Viaduct Draft EIS, we had two primary goals. The first was that the document would indeed meet the statutory and regulatory requirements for the Environmental Impact Statement process. The second was to provide the public and decision-makers a document supporting a new paradigm of public engagement in an overall planning and decision process that is much larger than the NEPA process. That process should yield informed decisions about projects' environmental consequences, among many other things, and also draw public understanding and support for our decision-makers' choices.

The Alaskan Way Viaduct Draft EIS was prepared as a collaborative enterprise among many agency employees, consultants, and a remarkable influx of public comment and suggestions. The views in this presentation are those of WSDOT and may be embraced or not in their own distinctive degree by others in the process.

Some of the key individuals who led the preparation of the document include:

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1 Craig T. Casper, ed., "Federal Highway Agency Staff Gather For National Environmental Conference," *TRB A1F02 Newsletter - Environmental Analysis in Transportation,* (November 2004).

Engaging the Public in the Project

For the Alaskan Way Viaduct Project, we recognized the need to present information to the public that would engage public participation in the entire decision-making process. The Viaduct team created and continues to build an extensive program of public engagement. We formed and supported a civic-based Leadership Group, presented at hundreds of community meetings, and emphasized the project's urgency through extensive local media coverage. Additionally, we responded to thousands of public comments and inquiries, many elicited through the project Web site, which continues to be viewed by thousands of citizens. This effort played a crucial role helping an array of public officials, running the gamut from city councilors to state legislators and members of Congress, consider and contribute to the project.

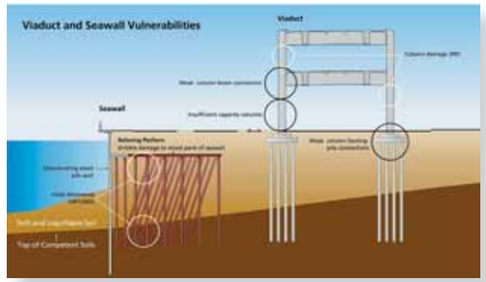
Public engagement is only as valuable as the quality and accessibility of the information that the public can obtain, evaluate and react to about the project. This was the challenge that our Environmental Impact Statement had to meet. Our EIS could not be another cumbersome document written only for professional EIS readers and the permitting solicitors and barristers – our EIS *had* to be useful for decision-makers and the public. As a result, the following concepts formed the foundation of our EIS.

Tell A Story

EISs are stories about projects in the communities where we live, work and play. We used the following tips when we created the Viaduct EIS:

· Writing clearly and using simple language
· Organizing our document to tell a story
· Explaining our project and why people should care

We used graphics like the one shown below to show people why the Viaduct Project was needed.



Make It Brief

We all know EISs often exceed 1,000 pages – even though NEPA regulations state that in most cases, they should be less than 150 pages long.

We made our EIS shorter by providing supporting documentation in the appendices, so only information relevant to the decision was contained in the EIS's main body. This allowed the EIS to be only 168 pages. Twenty-five documents totaling 4,000 pages of analysis were provided on an appendix CD.

Engage the Reader

We engaged readers by using question and answer headings. This format helps direct readers to the information they are most interested in, and helps them process the information they are reading. These headings also give writers an opportunity to make NEPA-required topics (such as logical project termini) more inviting to readers as shown in the example below:

Traditional EIS	*Reader-Friendly EIS*
Purpose and Need	**Why do we need this project?**
Project Termini and why they are logical	**Where is the project located?**
Social and Community Impacts	**How would the project affect neighborhoods and the people who live there?**

Make It Visual

Don't forget to make your document visual!

We used graphics like the visual simulations shown below to highlight differences between the alternatives. Graphics like these are much more interesting to readers and are more useful than tables or text.